

Forest Health Council, State Officials and the Insurance Industry Promote WUI Fire Codes

The AZ Gov's Forest Health Council is actively promoting the adoption of wildland urban interface (WUI) fire codes as part of the statewide strategy to restore Arizona's forest. The initiative began with a letter from AZ State Fire Marshal Phil Mele and AZ State Forester Vicki Christiansen to dozens of jurisdictions in the state urging adoption of the codes.

Joined by the Arizona Insurance Council (AIC), the association of property and casualty insurers in AZ, the initiative conducted a day-long event in Payson, AZ on July 16th 2009 to educate local officials on the benefits of the WUI Fire Codes.

Over 65 elected, staff and fire officials representing 27 communities from around the state attended the WUI Fire Codes Forum. The room was packed and the interest and energy level to learn about the WUI Fire Codes was very high.

State Fire Marshal, Phil Mele, (left) a co-host for the event, told attendees the WUI Fire Codes "can improve and better provide for the fire life safety of citizens, their property and the entire community in the unique environment of the wildland urban interface."



Currently, there are only five communities in Arizona that have adopted the WUI Fire Codes. At the Forum, the local officials learned that WUI Fire Codes reduce the burn rate of buildings and the costs of fighting fires. The codes also call for the use of fire resistant materials and building specifications and provide criteria for creating a "defensible space" around structures.

State Forester, Vicki Christiansen, (right) also a co-host of the forum, said, "Local communities are the key to implementing WUI Fire Codes that can mitigate wildfire risks. Federal, state and local forest and fire officials are here to partner with communities to address that vital role."

Ron Williams, executive director of the Arizona Insurance Council that hosted the Forum, said the insurance industry is willing to support the adoption of the WUI Fire Codes. "We can reduce losses and save lives and homes by adopting these reasonable and proven standards. Nationwide, the adoption of WUI fire codes has also reduced the cost of fighting wildland fires to communities."



The participants also heard from fire officials from the cities of Flagstaff and Prescott that have adopted the codes. And presentations were made from representatives of the National Fire Protection Association and Arizona Firewise.

The AIC was joined in the event by sponsors including the Institute for Business and Home Safety (IBHS), State Farm Insurance Companies and the National Association of Mutual Insurance Companies (NAMIC).



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